1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5)1938 Pukapukans

Soul Trap

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Though I believe the so-called "soul trap" was not used in Pukapukan culture but was only an ideological concept of one of the many traps with which the Underworld was full (p. 329), nevertheless particulars of the soul trap sold by Gill in 1876 to Sir Wollaston Franks for the British Museum may be given here. The following description as well as the print of the central portion of the trap (pl. 6) has been forwarded to me by Mr. Adrian Digby of the British Museum.

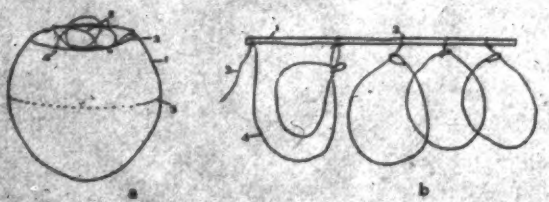

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Figure 48.—Bird snares. *a*, snare for *kui* birds (*maenga kui*) (C8135): drinking nut. (1) 4 inches high, with top removed to form opening (2) 3 inches in diameter; flesh removed from inside upper portion of nut down to dotted line (3); five holes bored through shell just below rim (4) and a length of prepared coconut fiber passes through each hole to be fastened by knot; free end of each fiber forms a slip noose (5); snare set by making five nooses which pass through each other and so block opening. *b*, snare (*maenga tuli*) (C8060) for *tuli* birds, section only of snare shown: stick (1) section of coconut midrib, 4 feet 4 inches long, ¾ inch in diameter; lengths of prepared coconut fiber (2) knotted at regular intervals along stick; fibers each knotted into slip nooses of which there are 23 on stick, each about 2½ inches in diameter; long fiber (3) with loop at end knotted to each end of stick and loop dropped over peg to anchor stick in place; a fixed loop (4) is knotted to each end of stick and placed over peg or held down with a stone to give more secure placement to snare; wings (*pa*) of coconut leaves and stones fan out at an angle of about 145 degrees from each end of stick to ensure that birds do not escape around ends of snare.

The trap (no. 9925, Christy Coll., British Mus.) has a total length of 19 feet 4½ inches and consists of eight loops (of which only six are shown in pl. 6) made by binding three-ply braid round a core. This core is made of double lengths of three-ply braided sennit, loose coconut fibers (probably those adhering to the roughly made sennit), and some two-ply twisted *tuo* fiber. The loops are lashed in pairs to a long three-ply sennit braid which tapers at both ends. The shorter end (F) terminates in a two-ply twist about 2 inches long. The material used in lashing loops to the central cord is a combination of coarse three-ply braid, with either a fine three-ply braid or a two-ply twist. No details of the lashing are available. Mr. Digby suggests that part of the material used in lashing the pair of loops (D) is a small quantity of bark cloth. But bark cloth was never made in Pukapuka, and it is probable that the material has been confused either with coconut leaf stipule (*kaka*) which is not generally used for lashings because of the weakness of the fibers, or else with thick strips of *tuo* fiber.

1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

Many other moral judgments, personal insults, and condemned peculiarities are to be found in the folk tales and stories, a study of which throws much light on the specific cultural patterning of preferred conduct in Pukapuka.

DREAMS

Pukapukan theory of the causation of dreams (*miti*) links with the psychology of the soul (p. 325). The soul is conceived of as a mobile unit that leaves the body at night during sleep and wanders freely about the world in search of adventures. It is these experiences of the soul that constitute the tissue of dream-life. There is no confusion between dream reality and the reality of waking life, though the dream experience is significant of supernormal life and helps to reenforce a set of related concepts which sum up for the Pukapukan his knowledge of the supernormal world.

Dreams are valuable circumstantial evidence to the Pukapukan for the existence of the Underworld (Po). Though it is rarely given to the layman to visit the Underworld in dreams, it was common experience for the priest, and his related experiences carried with them the conviction of certitude. At times the priest might reenforce his story by displaying trophies gained by him during his visits to the Underworld, as Levi, for instance, displayed the foods that he obtained there, or the gong beaters that he took from the hand of Tulikalo (p. 330). But these materialistic evidences were not necessary for his story to gain full credence. It is related that laymen acquired, through dream visits of their souls to the Underworld, special techniques in craft activities, such as the making of fine plaited upper-body garments, which could not be learned by ordinary knowledge of a craft or by prolonged practice at its principles. Because a soul can no longer visit the Underworld of old-time Pukapuka, the making of certain garments is a lost art today.

Some dreams, especially nightmares and dreams of suffocation, are caused by the activities of free-wandering spirits and malicious familiars (*aitu*) which come to a person in sleep, grapple with his soul, and strangle it. It is the terror of this embrace that produces for the Pukapukan the peculiar horror of the nightmare. Other spirits have been known to come to a woman in sleep and have intercourse with her. Against these spirits there is no defense.

The only type of pleasant dream experience is a dream sign of the conception of a child (*miti makatiti tangata*), which generally relates to the experience of the soul with pretty flowers, trees heavily laden with fruits or coconuts, or flourishing talo beds. Dreams of falling from trees or hills down to a lower level are bad, and ill fortune will come to the dreamer or to a close relative of his. To dream of one who is dead is a sign that someone related to the dreamer will soon die, the implication being that the dreamer's soul has already seen in the Underworld one who will soon die. There is no way of mitigating the effects of a bad dream. One may tell the dream to

1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

him to cure sickness, to see into a man and discover his secret sins, to see spirits and cope with their malicious ways. In the stories there are few examples of unscrupulous priests who used their powers to blackmail the community in order to gain advantages over the people, or to humble their rivals. Undoubtedly, in any dynamic community, the clash of personalities would lead some priests to be more unscrupulous in the use of their powers than others, but this seems to have been rare.

People and Gods

Each lineage possessed exclusive rights to consult certain gods, and a man would never think, under ordinary circumstances, of consulting the gods of a lineage not his own. Within the one household, however, where the wife or relatives came from another lineage, the household head would be able with propriety to derive assistance from several gods by allowing members of his household to consult the gods of their own lineages in important household occupations. Minor gods were often worshiped by people of several different lineages, but this was due to historical accident now forgotten. General departmental gods, like Tamayei, though belonging to one lineage, received offerings from all the people because of their relation to the welfare of the whole island. In consultations of these gods as well as of Mataliki and Taug, the people of the island were always concerned; they watched the consultations of the supreme chief or his executive but would not themselves participate in any way in such consultations. Finally, the lineage gods that control fishing and weather were prayed to by any lineage making a fishing expedition or a canoe voyage through the priest of a god who procured the god's favor for them. In the canoe voyage, it was advantageous to have as a member of the crew a priest from the lineage that controlled the sea and weather gods.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

The Soul

The Pukapukan concept of life after death is intimately linked with the idea of the soul. In sleep the soul (*mauli*) leaves the material body and wanders about the land. It meets other souls with which it sometimes quarrels; in the fight that results one soul may be killed. It cannot then come back to its material body, and when the individual wakens the next morning, he is without his soul. He quickly sickens and dies, because the material body cannot exist without its spiritual counterpart.

The soul wanders round with all the desires and emotions of the body, but without a material covering or embodiment. It lacks the clarity of awareness and understanding that it has when embodied in a material sub-

1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

stance. When the gods caused man to descend from the god Mataliki, they were afraid to give his soul full awareness, because once it left the body enjoying full awareness, it would never come back, and the body would thus be superfluous. The gods therefore ensured that the soul would see the world in a misty fashion only, that it would be afraid of daylight and thus would have to see the world always under cover of darkness. The soul hurries home at dawn. Dreams are often indistinct and easily forgotten because the soul is not clearly aware of the adventures it has when it wanders about in the night. Medicine men (*tangata wotu*) who had the power of seeing souls in the dark often killed them on the theory that they were up to some mischief, causing sickness. Hence the soul always tried to avoid the medicine man in its nightly perambulations.

After death of the material body for whatever reason, the soul is finally released for all time from the body. It journeys to the Underworld, where it takes up permanent residence and enjoys the full pleasure and awareness denied to it in the upper world. There is no question of reincarnation, because the soul will not readily resume the bondage of the body after tasting the delights of full awareness in the Underworld. The gods may intervene to return the soul to the body after a short sojourn in the Underworld, usually at the supplication of those mourners left on earth, never at the supplication of the soul itself.

The Cosmos

The Pukapukan idea of the cosmos, complementing the ideology of the soul, is that the cosmos consists of three major levels, indefinitely extensive flat surfaces. The level of this world of humans comprises *te papa wenua* and *te papa moana*, the level of land and of sea. Above is *te papa langi*, the level of the sky. The sky meets land or sea at the horizon, which is thought of as the side of the sky, *te tqua o te langi*. The sky therefore limits the indefinite expansion of the earthly levels. Below the level of this world is the Po, the Underworld, itself made up of three further indefinitely extensive levels, *te kapi lunga*, *te kapi lalo*, and *te po likuliku*. No limit to these levels is known.

The Underworld

Pukapukan knowledge of the Underworld (fig. 54) is derived from the visit made by Wotoa and Te Yoa, two seers, who figure also as the heroes who rid Pukapuka of the god-ogre, Te Atua Pule. Neither of these brothers comes into the genealogies. The account they brought back was supplemented by dream visits of other seers to the Underworld at later dates, and by dreams of laymen. The account of the visit of Wotoa and Te Yoa is as follows:

1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

people rushed round them to hear of their adventures. They told of their journey, and later introduced to Pukapuka all the activities—arts, crafts, and games—of the Underworld. From their visit, supplemented by voyages abroad, is derived all the knowledge of the Pukapukans in these arts.

Other priests who visited the Underworld brought back the knowledge of talo food preparations, of which the original inhabitants of Pukapuka were unaware. Perhaps, say informants, this coincided with the reintroduction of fire to Pukapuka by the god Ngaliyeyeu after the seismic wave. The seer Levi, who lived just prior to white contact, is said to have shown the people of Pukapuka many times the food—fish, talo, and nuts—that his spirit brought back to him after one of its visits to the Underworld.

Some visitors to the Underworld have reported the existence of an eight-walled enclosure on the *kapi hunga*, presided over by the god Te Vayi. In this enclosure was kept burning a hot fire, into which adulterers, for example, are supposed to have been thrown by Te Vayi. Confirmatory evidence for the existence of this walled enclosure was given by seers who told relatives of the dead that they had visited the Po looking for the souls of the deceased, in order to bring them back to Pukapuka, but that they could not discover the souls and therefore assumed that they had been consumed in this fire. It is possible that this legend of a fire burning in the Underworld represents a survival in Pukapuka of the widespread Polynesian idea of an underworld fire visited by a culture hero who brought fire back to mortals, an idea that has perhaps been affected by missionary teaching.

The souls of living, dying, or dead men that visited the Underworld seem to have had about equal chances of escaping back to mortal body or being ensnared in the Po and remaining there forever. Each of the stopping places mentioned by Wotoa and Te Yoa was either a place which reminded the soul of the world it had left, giving it the opportunity to go back before it was too late, or was a trap designed to catch the unwary soul and so draw it on ever deeper into that part of the Underworld from which there is no return. Perhaps this idea of equal chances is a reflex of the number of times Pukapukans have seen unconsciousness in sick people unaccompanied by heart cessation or decay of the body. If, for instance, the soul balancing on the oscillating stone of Yokamani was not precipitated into the Po likuliku then it still had an opportunity of returning to the upper world. But the soul that washed in the fresh water springs washed away all memory of the upper world, and its chances were proportionately less. When the soul reached the house of Leva, the gods smelled its arrival, and always anxious for fresh company to amuse them with stories, singing, and dancing, they insisted on taking the soul from Leva's mat. This represented the ultimate depth of the Underworld from which there was no returning, or at least

1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

[774] 775 from which there is only one story of a return, that of Milimili who was assisted by the gods, Tulikalo and Tangata-no-te-moana.

When a new soul became finally imprisoned in the Underworld, it was welcomed by all its deceased relatives, who came forward and provided a feast for the new spirit. There were no class distinctions in the Po; hence there was no special reception or treatment for a chief. Spirits did not grow old or mature in the Po. People who died old were looked after by relatives who had died young. Babies never grew up. The old cared for the children, and the young men and women provided food for the rest of the community.

775 539 Final knowledge of the Underworld before white contact was derived from a visit of the seer Levi:

> One night Levi heard certain sounds of strange music which he diagnosed as slit gong beats of a rhythm unknown on Pukapuka. The music was obviously coming from two wooden gongs played by a skilled musician. Levi decided to follow this strange music, so (in a trance) his soul left his body and journeyed to the Underworld. It came to the place where the gods were merrily dancing to the rhythms of Tulikalo. Levi watched in admiration the skill displayed by this god as he beat out the most intricate rhythms. Levi admired also the beautiful gong sticks of polished ironwood and longed to possess these for himself. Levi drew near the god, and, profiting by a sudden diversion of attention, snatched the sticks from the place where Tulikalo had laid them, and sped back to Pukapuka. Avoiding all entanglements, Levi duly arrived on Wale. In the morning he showed the sticks to the people, explaining how he came into possession of them. One stick was later lost; but the other is in Pukapuka today, doing duty as a knife handle.

MAGIC

789 [776] [782] The use of black or white magic in Pukapuka was apparently extremely rare in former days. Most of the many references to white magic in the stories refer to the power exercised by the gods to protect or otherwise serve their worshipers. The gods were communicated with and asked to do these favors through the ordinary method of prayer (*takutaku*). The priest Pakai is said to have procured favors from his god by making some use of *welo* bark streamers on his headdress, but whether these streamers were used as a sort of bait object, no informant could tell. Two examples of white magic involving the use of bait objects are found among the stories: Vaetuaniu endows a coconut midrib with the power of speech by spitting into a coconut cup which he places on the midrib; the chief Tuyiyauola, in Yayake, has a woman bear him a child by putting some of his semen in a coconut cup and floating it over the water to the woman who rubs it over her body (p. 381).

No white magic technique was remembered by informants. The Polynesian word *karakia* is not found in the Pukapukan dialect. The word *talotalo*, however, means an incantation, in the sense of a spell which magically causes a desired result. The only example of a *talotalo* that informants could recall was the one used by Yinata to put together again the tree chopped down by

1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

Lats (1). As has already been mentioned, little use was made of white magic in economic activities.

The only black magic indulged in seems to have been based on suggestion; no bait objects were used. A priest might silently or orally curse a man with sickness, or else pray to his god either to send an evil substance to eat out an enemy's vitals or send an evil familiar spirit, the spirit of one newly dead, for instance, to enter a man for the same purpose. This was done solely through the power of the priest to communicate with the god and not by using or working upon material objects. When it was known that a man had been thus mentioned to a god by a priest, the man would sicken unless he could get another priest to apply to another god for counter-protection.

Mention has been made (p. 328) of the nooses (*matapili*) that Wotoa and Te Ɣoa saw hanging from the *puka* tree of Tangi which were used to trap and strangle spirits. Gill reports that he procured from Pukapuka an "ere'aerua" (soul trap), which was used by the priests in the upper world to trap the souls of living victims (pl. 6). Gill (10, p. 181) writes:

> If a person had the misfortune to offend the "sacred men", or were very ill, a soul-trap would be suspended by night from a branch of one of the gigantic laurel trees (*puka*) overshadowing his dwelling. If the family enquired "the sin for which the soul-trap was set up," some ceremonial offense against the gods would of course be assigned. The priest would sit opposite watching. If an insect or small bird chanced to fly through one of the loops, it was asserted that the soul of the culprit, assuming this form, had passed into the trap. The demon VAERUA,[20] or "spirit" presiding over the spirit world, was believed to hurry off the unlucky soul to the shades, to feast upon. It would speedily be known throughout the island that So-and-so had lost his soul, and great would be the lamentation.
>
> The friends of the unhappy man would seek to propitiate the sorcerer by large presents of food and property, begging him to intercede with dread VAERUA for the restoration of the soul. This was sometimes accomplished; but at other times the priests reported that his prayers were unavailing, and VAERUA could not be induced to send back the spirit to reinhabit the body. The culprit fully believing all that the priest said—was he not the mouth-piece of the gods, and cognisant of the secrets of the spirit-world?—gave up all hope. His friends mourned over him as one dead; and at last the poor fellow faded away through sheer mental distress at having his spirit ensnared.
>
> In cases of mere sickness, where the friends were anxious to know whether the sick man would get well again, if the priest reported that his spirit did not enter the snare, it was inferred that he would recover.
>
> I enquired why some of the loops were so large, whilst others were so small. The "sacred-man" said to me, testily, "Don't you know that there are different sorts of souls —some small and others large?" I understood him to mean that the large loops were to entrap the souls of adults, the smaller ones to catch the souls of infants. The words used would imply that the large loops were for the souls of chiefs, and the small ones for the souls of common people.

The Pukapukan for *ere vaerua* would be *yele vaelua* (noose spirit-like or spirit-like noose), but the word *vaelua* would rarely be used in this sense; a

[20] Presumably Gill here refers to the departmental god, Te Atua Vaelua.

1;Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

more correct name would be *yale mauli*. Many informants were repeatedly questioned about this soul trap, separately and together, and all agreed that Gill must have confused a bird trap or bird noose which he saw hanging to a tree with the story he heard of the *matapili* noose in the Underworld. One type of bird noose, *yale mauu* (fig. 4,*b*), consisted of loops of sennit suspended from a *puka* tree. It is significant that Gill talks about a birdlike representative of a soul passing into the *ere tuerua*. It is likely, I think, that in order to blacken the past, a convert made for Gill what he said was a soul trap. From the old chant, "Maka taku kupu ko te tonoanga", informants quoted the following phrases to confirm their point that the noose was used in the Underworld only:

Na yalu ko te talakelaka	You were tied to the *talakelaka* tree
Waktwiwi aka te mauli, koa mate, koa elo	(Your) soul was tangled (in the trap), died, stank,
Wakatautili ai tana i te pu o te puka a Tangi,	We were both thrown to the foot of the *puka* tree of Tangi,
Wakauka ko te wale pootiu . . .	Entered the house of a thousand posts (the house of Leva) . . .

If the soul trap was really an instrument of witchcraft, as Gill was assured, then it acted through the force of suggestion. The priest did not work over the insect or bird that passed through the noose with incantations in order to provoke sickness or death.

Several informants were questioned on different occasions as to their knowledge of black magic. Examples of black magic in western Europe were adduced to give them confidence, but even this lead got no results. Even if informants have willfully forgotten material on sorcery which must to them smack of heathen practices, one might expect some survival of precautions directed against sorcery in the treatment of objects closely connected with the person. But the Pukapukan customs governing the disposal of objects charged with high personality tension, as compared with customs elsewhere in Polynesia, where fear of sorcery led to rigorous tapus or the disposal of such objects, indicate that there was extremely little fear of sorcery in Pukapuka:

> The sea took care of adult excreta, and of most child excreta; no precautions are taken today to dispose of excreta of children too young to go to the sea. Adults expectorate anywhere. Finger and toe nails are cut anywhere; formerly they were bitten off and spat out onto the ground. According to informants, the hair was rarely cut during life, and was worn long by both sexes. Some informants said that hair clippings were buried; others said that hair was often cut from a dead person, particularly from the head of a deceased favorite child, and the hair plaited into a mala or else into a cord by which pearl-shell ornaments were hung on the breast. Formerly, if a woman's hair fell into food, the food was considered spoiled by this contact. When a tooth pained, it was pulled out, taken to the god house of the lineage and deposited there with a prayer to the god of the lineage that he send a new tooth to replace the one thus given to the god. Old clothes were burned or used as rags. Today clothes are worn to rags

1. [See p. 64, category 116—analyst.]

1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

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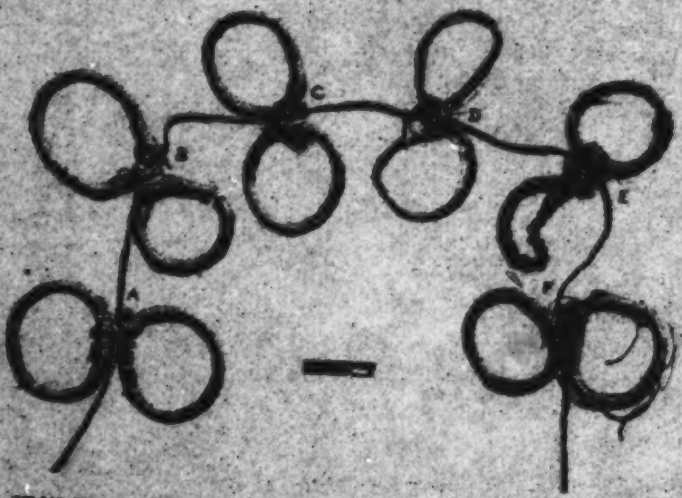

GILL'S PUKAPUKAN SOUL TRAP. DIMENSIONS: END TO A, 13 FEET 1½ INCHES; A TO B, 4½ INCHES; B TO C, 7½ INCHES; C TO D, 4½ INCHES; D TO E, 7 INCHES; E TO F, 6 INCHES; F TO END, 4 FEET 5½ INCHES; APPROXIMATE DIAMETERS OF CIRCLES VARY FROM 4 INCHES TO 5 INCHES.